

The Garden

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If you have a news story, please contact News Editor Anisa Gress
Email: news@rhs.org.uk
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Halting a horticultural crisis

A realistic timetable to improve the image of horticulture and close the 'green skills gap' has been presented to the UK Government, in a new report called *Horticulture Matters*. This is one of the first times the RHS has directly interacted with the Government, and it received an enthusiastic reaction from MPs.

At the presentation, the keynote speech welcoming the report was given by David Heath MP, Minister for Agriculture and Food.

Produced by the RHS with leading horticultural businesses and organisations – from food producers to education – *Horticulture Matters* gives MPs an easy-to-digest overview of horticulture; its value to the UK economy; and how the crippling skills shortage is coming to threaten food security and the environment.

The report's content draws on results from a recent RHS survey of more than 200 businesses. This showed that 93 percent of those



RHS President Elizabeth Banks with a copy of the report.

surveyed thought Government help was needed to support the development of horticultural skills, and 87 percent said the horticultural industry could do more to facilitate better links between businesses, schools and colleges. Government backing to increase financial support is needed to do more to promote the nature and breadth of horticultural careers, and enable employers to train their staff, including apprenticeships.

'We are unanimous in the belief that there must be urgent action to save British horticulture and it must

happen now,' said Sue Biggs, RHS Director General. 'Our report calls on the Government, employers and those in education to take action to safeguard the critical role that horticulture plays in Britain today.'

Pledges and promises

The report concludes with a 'timetable for change', with pledges to realise between October 2013 and October 2015. These are made up of promises made by the horticultural industry, matched by pragmatic requests from the Government. They aim to improve perceptions of horticulture, encourage its inclusion within the National Curriculum, support horticulture in higher and further education, and safeguard skills within research, food and the environment.

Easier developments such as making videos for the Grow Careers website could be achieved by the industry within months, while longer-term projects such as raising the number of horticultural BSc and MSc courses, and PhD opportunities, could come to fruition in 2015.

Another pledge is to increase the number of apprenticeships for young people. The RHS is taking on four apprentices, and plans to raise this to 15. The Chelsea Centenary Appeal, launched at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, aims to raise £1 million to help fund these apprenticeships.

Next steps

Following the launch, the RHS and representatives from other organisations in the sector are meeting with parliamentarians and representatives from key government departments to continue to ensure that the pledges and promises into action.



MORE SURVEY RESULTS

90% say horticulture lacks career appeal

19% recruit from overseas

10% of vacancies take more than a year to fill

❖ To download a copy of the report, search 'Horticulture Matters' at www.rhs.org.uk



Skilled staff are increasingly hard to find, a recent RHS-lead survey uncovered.

CAREERS ADVICE

❖ For information on careers throughout the horticulture industry, visit: www.growcareers.info

Letters

CONTACT US

Write to: The Garden, RHS Media, Churchgate, New Rd, Peterborough PE1 1TT or email: thegarden@rhs.org.uk (please include your postal address). Letters on all gardening topics are welcome, but may be edited for publication.

Plum jam

Tom La Dell's article on plums (*The Garden*, September 2013, pp68-71) continues to receive plenty of responses:

'Victoria' plum may be the most popular kind in the UK but it is susceptible to silver leaf disease. Yet there is a little-known plum (pictured above right), almost indistinguishable from 'Victoria', that is resistant to silver leaf. The plum was found by my father in the 1930s in his Essex garden – his 'Victoria' plum trees were destroyed by the disease, yet this seedling remained unharmed. In 1968, Brogdale (the National Fruit Collection) reported the plum cropped more heavily than 'Victoria' due to its disease resistance; they named it 'Mann's Number 1' and it is still available from at least two UK nurseries.

Geoffrey Mann, Surrey

I have a six-year-old 'Victoria' plum on my allotment. The amount of fruit varies from year to year, but however many plums there are, a high proportion are always



spoiled by plum moth. I was disappointed to find no reference to this pest, nor on its control, in the article.

David Harris, Surrey

❖ Andrew Salisbury, Senior Entomologist, RHS Garden Wisley, writes: '*Caterpillars of the plum moth feed on fruit, making them unfit to eat. A pheromone plum moth trap used May–July may capture enough males on isolated trees to give some protection. These traps also indicate when moths are active, and help with timing of pesticide use. Spray with deltamethrin (Bayer Sprayday Greenfly Killer) or lambda-cyhalothrin (Westland Plant Rescue Fruit & Vegetable Bug Killer) when traps indicate a peak of activity, usually about mid June.*'



RHS / TIM SANDALL

The need for professionals

I was saddened to read Sara Handley's comments (*Letters*, September 2013, p19). What is referred to as 'a piece of paper' represents, in most cases, years of hard work in the study of a multitude of subjects – from plant pathology and plant identification to genetics.

Amateur gardeners are on the whole knowledgeable, and many have years of experience, but this does not qualify them as professionals.

Graham Alderton, Kent

Plastic overkill

Among the talk of living walls, rooftop gardens and sustainable gardening, there is never a mention of the unremitting use of plastic that underpins most domestic gardening. There must be millions of plants in plastic pots churned out by every nursery and garden centre in the country. It is virtually impossible to buy a plant without it coming encased in plastic. Can the RHS consider how its overuse should be tackled?

Marcelle Burton, London



RHS / HELEN JERMYN

Glorious *Aster x frikartii* 'Monch', one of several excellent but similarly coloured selections.

Use for harlequins

It is pleasing to read there is a possibility of developing medicines from harlequin ladybirds (*News*, August 2013, p10). After having killed rather a lot, I decided to give them a chance this year. I put several of the ladybirds on my runner beans, which were suffering from blackfly. By the end of August we were picking loads of beans from healthy plants. Perhaps they are not so evil after all.

Janet Cornwall, Hertfordshire

From the RHS website

The RHS website features information on all aspects of gardening, including:

- ❖ ideas for what to plant, where, and how to care for it
- ❖ details and features on RHS Flower Shows and events
- ❖ latest news from the gardening world, plus much more.

You can also enjoy a members-only RHS Advisory Service: search 'RHS advisory service' to find out how you can contact the service by email, telephone, post or in person. **www.rhs.org.uk**



RHS Advice

Practical advice this month from the RHS Advisory Service

CONTACT

For free gardening advice, contact the RHS Members' Advisory Service at RHS Garden Wisley
Email: gardeningadvice@rhs.org.uk
Tel: 0845 260 8000

Cultivating bulbs for spring

Spring-flowering 'bulbs', in the widest sense, include a range of corms, tubers, rhizomes and true bulbs. Most true bulbs are adapted to well-drained soils in full sun. For shady areas consider *Anemone nemorosa*, *Corydalis solida*, *Erythronium* and *Galanthus*. Select bulbs that are firm and of good size for their type; the larger the bulb, the more likely it is to flower. Check each is healthy, with no obvious signs of damage or disease.

Bulbs to flower in spring are usually available during September. Most are best planted immediately: spring-flowering bulbs make extensive root growth if planted in early autumn. If planting is delayed, keep them dry and cool. Bedding-type tulips can be planted even as late as midwinter.

Where to plant

Bulbs from cool, moist woodland habitats generally need shaded conditions, and the dried-out bulbs of woodland plants such as *Erythronium*, *Galanthus* and *Cyclamen* sold in multipacks in autumn often establish poorly. Buy these species from specialist nurseries that despatch damp-packed bulbs after midsummer.

Most hardy bulbs are from areas with dry-summer climates and prefer a warm sunny site with good drainage. Fertile soil is important as most have only a short period in leaf before dying back. Thoroughly cultivate and improve the soil and, especially on dry sandy soils, incorporate plenty of well-rotted organic matter.

Do not dig holes in heavy soils and fill with grit – this creates a 'sump' where water collects and bulbs will rot. Cultivate the whole area and, where drainage is poor, form the soil into a low mound and plant into it, or construct raised beds.

Plant bulbs in groups with the growing points uppermost. As a general rule, plant at least three times the depth of the bulb, with a similar distance between bulbs. Plant more deeply on sandy soils. Apply a balanced fertiliser in early spring as the shoots begin to appear.

More from the RHS For more, search 'Spring bulbs' at www.rhs.org.uk



Planting depths of spring bulbs

2.5cm (1in)

- ❖ *Bellevalia*
- ❖ *Cyclamen*
- ❖ *Eranthis*
- ❖ *Anemone blanda*

5cm (2in)

- ❖ *Anemone nemorosa*
- ❖ *Corydalis solida*
- ❖ *Fritillaria meleagris*
- ❖ *Hyacinthella*
- ❖ *Leucojum*
- ❖ *Puschkinia*

7.5cm (3in)

- ❖ *Chionodoxa*
- ❖ *Crocus*
- ❖ *Erythronium*
- ❖ *Hermodactylus*
- ❖ *Iris reticulata*
- ❖ *Scilla*

10cm (4in)

- ❖ *Galanthus* (may be better planted 'in the green')
- ❖ *Muscari*

12cm (5in)

- ❖ *Hyacinthus*

15cm (6in)

- ❖ *Narcissus* ❖ *Tulipa*

20cm (8in)

- ❖ *Fritillaria imperialis*



Garden visits

Make the most of your membership by enjoying free entry to RHS Gardens and RHS Partner Gardens



Take pleasure in irises

From this month and into June, graceful bearded irises make an impact in gardens across the UK, including:

- ✦ **Godinton House**, Kent (see *RHS Members' Handbook 2013*, p74);
- ✦ **Marks Hall Garden and Arboretum**, Essex (*Handbook*, p69);
- ✦ **Doddington Hall**, Lincolnshire (*Handbook*, p94).

www.rhs.org.uk For more garden-visiting ideas, including Doddington Hall's top tips for irises, see www.rhs.org.uk/partnergardens



RHS / AU CUNDY



Seaforde Gardens

May is one of the best times to visit this extensive garden. Among its stars are *Rhododendron*, including 130-year-old *R. arboreum* hybrids, and large-leaved species wild-collected in Vietnam and China. Take time to explore Ireland's oldest maze (right), planted with hornbeam hedges and featuring a central arbour covered with *Rosa mulliganii*.

✦ **Seaforde**, Co Down BT30 8PG;
www.seafordegardens.com;
028 4481 1225; *RHS Members' Handbook 2013*, p107.



Books

RHS mail order: 01483 211320;
www.rhsshop.co.uk

Genus Cyclamen: Science, Cultivation, Art and Culture

Brian Mathew (Editor) 592pp, 2013, Kew Publishing, ISBN 9781842464724, RRP £90

How do you make 23 species fill 574 pages? A self-indulgent exercise one might think. However, the Cyclamen Society has managed it – in collaboration with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew – and produced this weighty tome, apparently bringing together all the experts on the subject.

There is a mass of detail here and, as might be expected in a multi-authored book, quite a lot of overlap of information and writing of variable quality. Yet the well-crafted and erudite sections on 'Development of *Cyclamen persicum* cultivars' (by Diony de Bont and John Grimshaw) and 'Cyclamen in the Old Herbals' (by Martyn Denney and John Grimshaw) throw new light on these subjects. Despite all the research into *Cyclamen* in recent years, there are no significant changes to the taxonomy and classification of the genus from that which I proposed in 2002.

What there is instead is a great deal of factual infilling aided by numerous observations of the species in the field and in cultivation. Strangely in so much text there is no generic description nor a key to species, which seems odd, yet the species descriptions are nicely presented. But perhaps it is the anecdotes of field trips and observations that most entice the eye of the reader.

Although they make interesting reading, the inclusion of nearly 100 pages of the Cyclamen Society's previously published field reports is an excessive indulgence. What was needed here was a clever analysis and digest of the findings.

The text is set off by numerous photographs, mostly of high quality. For me, the crowning glory of this work is the beautiful paintings by Christabel King and Pandora Sellars – two of Britain's finest



botanical artists. It is a pity that the book's designers enlarged most of these, as they were all painted life-size and as such would have looked less cramped on the page and more easily comparable.

This absorbing work will be eagerly sought by *Cyclamen* aficionados. The price may inhibit the casual reader, but even they would learn a great deal. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is to be congratulated in carrying on the tradition of producing botanical monographs. ● Christopher Grey-Wilson is a horticulturist, botanist and author

A Green and Pleasant Land

Ursula Buchan 320pp, 2013, Hutchinson, ISBN 9780091944155, RRP £20

Launched by the Ministry of Agriculture within a month of the outbreak of the Second World War, the 'Dig for Victory' campaign had a profound psychological impact at the time, and down the decades has become the stuff of legend. This is why Ursula Buchan's thoroughly researched, insightful and comprehensive book is such a boon to all readers who are interested in unearthing the truth about this most fascinating aspect of the war on the Home Front.

She opens with a couple of scene-setting chapters examining the British garden and

gardening in the 1930s and the immediate impact of the declaration of war. Then Buchan gets her teeth into her topic. Indeed, what I enjoyed most is the way in which she expands out her examination of 'Dig for Victory' to analyse and assess the many significant – and some unexpected – ways in which it affected the British and their gardens. It played positive and immediate roles in, for example, the emancipation and education of women gardeners, the advancement of horticultural sciences, the mass-popularisation of the gardening media (BBC radio programme *The Kitchen Front* attracted an average of nearly 5½ million listeners per broadcast in 1940), and the recognition that gardening was a form of relaxation. Of the negatives, two which stand out are the popularisation of intensive pesticide use and the loss of garden heritage in the aftermath of the war.

This book is a rattling good read that reveals a new and broad perspective on one of the most intriguing aspects of British garden and wartime history. ●

Toby Musgrave is a garden historian, author and horticulturist



Recently published



Abundance

Practical guide to storing and preserving garden produce.

Alys Fowler, 208pp, 2013, Kyle Books, ISBN 9780857830784 RRP £16.99



Garden Peonies

An updated edition of James Kelway's original book.

Dave Root, 128pp, 2013, Picts Hill Publishing, ISBN 9781904496083 RRP £14.99



Landprints: The Landscape Designs of Bernard Trainor

Susan Heeger, 192pp, 2013, Princeton Architectural Press, ISBN 9781616891305 RRP £30